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ALERT **TOP STORY** **EDITOR'S PICK**

In call from jail, Gerace continues to claim prosecutors wrongly targeted him

From the Complete coverage: The case of Peter Gerace Jr. series

Dan Herbeck

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Ten weeks after a jury convicted him of drug trafficking, human trafficking conspiracy and other crimes at the Pharaoh's strip club, Peter G. Gerace Jr. remains an angry man who is determined to prove that he was wrongly targeted by federal law enforcement.

Speaking by telephone from the Chautauqua County Jail, Gerace told The Buffalo News on Saturday that he hopes the Trump administration officials who recently took control of the Justice Department will re-examine the case and take action to overturn his convictions.

"I spend most of my time writing letters to people about what happened to me ... What happened to me should never happen to anyone in this country," Gerace told The News.

The News asked if he hopes President Trump, who also claims he was wrongly targeted by the Justice Department, might someday pardon him. "With a new regime coming in, I think we have a good shot," Gerace said.



Peter Gerace Jr.

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While Gerace, 57, has in the past sent many letters to The News professing his innocence, he has never before spoken in detail with the news media about his conviction.



Jury finds Pharaoh's strip club owner guilty on all but one count

The U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment Saturday when contacted by The News about Gerace's claims. But in the past, prosecutors have defended the case against Gerace, saying he illegally sold drugs, gave drugs to some of his dancers and

pressured dancers into providing sex to Pharaoh's customers.

"This case showcased the reality of trafficking in Western New York and across the country," said Matthew Miraglia, special agent in charge of the Buffalo FBI office, after the trial. The FBI agent said Gerace used his dancers' drug addictions to "coerce them into commercial sex acts."

Gerace on Saturday denied that any illegal activity occurred at his Cheektowaga strip club. He said he believes he was unfairly targeted by federal prosecutors who hoped his case would lead to bigger cases against "the Mafia" and leaders of the Outlaws motorcycle club.

"They knowingly put witnesses on the stand who lied about me, and nobody was charged with perjury," Gerace said. "They tried to tell the jury, 'The Mafia, the Outlaws, this is terrible!' It was all false information."



New attorney general's orders could affect WNY's witness-death case, defense lawyers

say

And Gerace also said he blames federal agents and prosecutors “100 percent” for the 2022 suicide death of his friend, State Supreme Court Justice **John L. Michalski**, and the 2023 drug overdose of Crystal Quinn, a former dancer at Pharaoh’s who was expected to testify as a prosecution witness.

As The News has previously reported, Michalski was repeatedly asked by federal agents to talk with them about his longtime friendship with Gerace. In 2021, Michalski dove in front of a moving train in Depew in what authorities called a suicide attempt. In 2022, **he took his own life** in his Amherst home.

Federal prosecutors were trying to convince Michalski to testify that he was involved in illegal dealings with Gerace, Gerace told The News on Saturday.

Michalski was his former attorney and a close friend, but there was nothing improper or illegal about his relationship with the judge, Gerace said. He accused Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph Tripi of making false allegations that Michalski had inappropriate relations with a stripper at Pharaoh’s.

“Tripi tried to make a big deal out of the fact that the judge had been at my house. In reality, John came to my house with his wife and kids. They were our friends,” Gerace said. “I had all kinds of lawyers, judges and prominent people at my home, but this was for parties with families, with a snow cone machine and a bounce house for the kids ... And John never came to Pharaoh’s after he became a judge.”



Complete coverage: The case of Peter Gerace Jr.

He also claimed that **Quinn**, who died of a drug overdose at the home of a convicted criminal in Wellsville, committed suicide.

Police have never called the overdose death a suicide. Gerace and three other men, including John Ermin, a leader of the Outlaws biker club who was a Pharaoh's manager, face charges of witness tampering related to Quinn. In court papers, prosecutors accused the men of conspiring "to kill Crystal Quinn." Gerace and his co-defendants deny the charges, and that case has not yet come to trial.

Prosecutors and federal agents know that Gerace had nothing to do with Quinn's death, Gerace said. He claimed that Quinn killed herself because federal agents kept pressuring her to give false testimony.

“In fact, I begged her on the telephone not to kill herself,” Gerace said. He told The News that prosecutors “must have” evidence of that phone call, but have not released it.

Gerace also claimed that Tripi targeted him because he was an Italian-American “who drove a Maserati, had a big home and a successful business.” Tripi, who is Italian-American, has told The News in the past that he never targets any defendant because of their nationality.



A DEA agent was cleared of accepting a bribe from Peter Gerace. So how could Gerace be convicted of bribing him?

Gerace said he contacted The News on Saturday because he was upset about news reports linking him and Pharaoh's to **criminal charges** announced on Friday against Darryl Lamont Paul, who runs a business providing strippers and topless bartenders to stag parties. Paul is accused of attempted sex trafficking and cocaine sales.

Federal prosecutors called Paul a friend and business associate of Gerace, and said they had a “symbiotic relationship,” sharing some employees.

That is “absolutely untrue,” Gerace said. “Lamont has been barred from Pharaoh’s for six or seven years, because he stole one of our girls ... I have never authorized our girls to work for him.”

Gerace was convicted of conspiracy to commit sex trafficking and to defraud the United States, bribery of a federal drug agent, cocaine distribution, maintaining a drug-involved premises and witness tampering on Dec. 27, following a seven-week trial. He did not testify at the trial. He faces sentencing before District Judge Lawrence J. Vilardo.

As a result of those convictions, Gerace could lose his business and state liquor license. His family could lose the 3.2-acre property where Pharaoh’s is located, close to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport. Cheektowaga officials assess the value of the Aero Drive property, and the buildings on it, at \$1.2 million.

“Peter Gerace preyed on the most vulnerable victims, using them to grow his business and his profits,” former U.S. Attorney Trini Ross said after the trial.

Gerace will never stop fighting to prove he is innocent, he vowed during the Saturday interview, which lasted about 45 minutes. He is appealing his convictions while awaiting sentencing. In addition to The News, he said he has sent letters about his case to Trump and a wide array of other government officials.

Gerace said the most difficult part of his situation is that he rarely sees his son, an 18-year-old college student, in person. He said they sometimes talk by Zoom, but added that he hates having his son see him in jail.

“I don’t want my son to see me in a prison jumpsuit,” Gerace said. “I have had total custody of him since he was 4. I’ve been in jails for two years. It’s the only time I’ve ever been away from him for more than a week. It’s been hard on him, hard on me and my family.”

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